IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend paragraphs [0054] through [0055] spanning pages 19 and 20 as follows:

[0054] FIGS. ~~15~~ 15A and 15B are a perspective view and a cross-sectional view illustrating~~illustrates~~ an eighth embodiment of a fastener 200 according to the invention. One difference between fastener 200 and those shown and described above is that the fastener is substantially in the shape of a ball. By "ball" is meant those classes of shapes that are convex and generally round in shape and may be made up of one or more curved surfaces and/or include surfaces which are planar. Thus, as defined herein, "ball" includes but is not limited to the following shapes: sphere (FIGS. 15A-15B), prolate spheroid (FIG. 16), oblate spheroid (FIG. 17), regular convex polyhedra where the base polygon is at least a pentagon, i.e. a dodecahedron (FIG. 18C), icosahedron (FIG. 18A), and any other shapes, e.g. geodesic domes, that approximate a sphere (such as the shapes shown in FIGS. 18B, and 18D - 18F), or approximate the shapes of prolate spheroid or oblate spheroid.

[0055] As shown in ~~Figure 15~~FIGS. 15A - 15B, the fastener 200 is a solid, or alternatively, hollow member having a ball shape. Desirably, a top surface 218 and an opposite bottom surface 220 are substantially flat, to facilitate ease of placement and assembly onto a facing surface of an item, e.g. a rail. The fastener 200 is desirably fabricated as a single piece of a uniform material for ease of fabrication. Exemplary materials include nylon, plastics, polyvinyl chloride, and other deformable materials including but not limited to synthetic rubber and polyurethane. The fastener 200 preferably includes a first set of ridges 211 disposed on an exterior surface of a first portion 212 thereof, for use in frictionally engaging an interior surface of a cylindrical opening provided in a

longitudinal end of a picket or baluster. The maximum dimensions of the ridges of the fastener 200 are preferably selected to be slightly larger than the internal dimensions of the opening in the picket, e.g. by an amount on the order of hundredths of an inch along the diameter of the ridges, such that the ridges frictionally engage the interior surface of the opening in the picket and stay engaged despite stresses that the assembled rail and picket may encounter later. In such case, the fastener 200 and/or the ridges 211 are fabricated of a material and thickness such that some deformation of the ridges and/or the underlying ball occurs upon inserting the fastener 200 into the opening of the picket.